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Thus the brief review of English learning, into which we have now entered, brings us back to the French school, which we had already reached by the way of Madrid. It is not from any prejudice against the French style of poetry, that we have been led to represent its influence on the state of English learning as unfavorable. Pride, indeed, as well as principle, ought to induce us to do full justice to the merit of a foreign school, which possessed power enough to arrest the progress of the English mind, at one of its most active periods, and change its direction for a century. ‘Great let me call him, for he conquered me.’ We ought, for the honor of our fathers, to presume that the strange gods, which could draw them from their natural allegiance to Shakspeare and Milton, were not without some well-founded claims to real divinity; higher, perhaps, than the public of the present day is in general ready to admit. The character and real value of the principal writers of the French school may, probably, engage our attention in a future article.

ART. VIII.—*Memoirs of Brissot.*

*Mémoires de Brissot, Membre de l'Assemblée Législative et de la Convention Nationale, sur ses Contemporains et la Revolution Française. Publiés par son Fils avec des Notes et des Eclaircissemens Historiques. Par M. F. DE MONTROL. A Bruxelles. 3 vols. 12mo. 1830.*

‘BÉNISSEZ L’AMÉRIQUE,’ exclaimed Madame Roland, in 1788, while looking forward to the great events of the next year, with that virtuous hope, and those raised expectations, which were so miserably disappointed,—*attendons et voyons,—bénéissons l’Amérique.\** In whatever temper,—however lightly this emphatic expression may have been uttered, it comes full of meaning to our ear. It addresses us as the first successful propagators of those opinions, which, like leaven, are stirring the sluggish mass around us. It commands us to consider with lenity and compassion the errors and excesses of those, who are following our footsteps, under far less advanta-

\* Lettre à M. Bosc, 1st Oct. 1788.

geous circumstances. It bids us, from this observatory of freedom, to look out upon the troubled waters, on which the iron-bound oak of England, torn from its moorings, is swaying to and fro,—to hearken to the sound of strife, which reaches us across the Atlantic,—and reflect, that we are responsible for much of the evil, as well as much of the good which this contest is producing,—that our success has emboldened the patriots of every age and every nation; and that upon our moderation and our virtue it depends, whether, through every coming century, America shall be blessed as the first to establish and to teach rational liberty, or cursed as the propagator of false and impracticable dogmas, which have shaken the foundation of every civil and religious establishment.

In this country, there would be comparatively no difficulty in bringing the spirit of an impartial philosophy to bear upon the historical analysis of the events of the French Revolution, were they not intimately connected with some of the stormiest passages of our own annals. The great contest of opinion, which has not yet altogether ceased, renders it scarcely possible even to allude to the events of our constitutional history, without calling forth from their recesses those angry feelings, which are but slowly yielding to other and more recent causes of excitement.

We would hope, however, that the few remarks now to be made upon the character of one of the most prominent men of the French Revolution, will not furnish any such cause of offence. When his career closed, our internal contest can hardly be said to have begun; moreover, the ancient watchwords of party are gradually falling into disuse, and we are discovering, though not as rapidly as might be wished, the full force of perhaps the most generous sentiment which ever fell from the lips of a successful statesman in the first flush of victory:—‘we are all Republicans, we are all Federalists.’\*

The memoirs, of which the title is placed at the head of this paper, form one of the most recent additions to the long list of auto-biographies connected with the Revolution. The number of these productions, most of them written too at times of great danger, in prison or in lurking places, when blood was flowing like water, and the life of no man was safe for twenty-four hours, is strongly illustrative of that feature of the French

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\* Jefferson's Inaugural Address.

character, which seizes upon and solaces itself with whatever the present holds out, neither disquieted by reminiscences, nor troubled by fears.

What value should we not attach to the complete memoirs of any one of the eminent men of our early history, written while the strife was going on, and giving vividly the private narratives belonging to it? It is surprising to find how little we know of what may be called the domestic history of the old Congress. The amplitude of the French materials, on the contrary, is as wonderful as our deficiency. Not to speak of the memoir writers of the time of Napoleon, they have accounts of their early revolutionary period, written by representatives of nearly all the different factions that stood opposed to each other. There are the memoirs of Ferrières and Bésenval, nobles,—of Mounier a royalist, of Bailly the constitutionalist, of Rabaut St. Etienne, Louvet, Barbaroux, and now of Brissot, Girondists,—lastly, of Camille Desmoulins the Dantonist. Most of these, with a host of others, have been published collectively within the last ten years, under the title of *Mémoires relatifs à la Révolution Française*, forming a series, without which, we need scarcely say, it is impossible rightly to understand that most interesting period to which they relate. No compendium can supply their place. Even Mignet's work, perhaps the most to be relied upon, is rendered insufficient by his Tacitus-like brevity, while the Epitome of Scott, destined we fear for some time to fill the place of one less partial, has most of the defects and few of the virtues of an abridgment. It is even more wanting in clearness than in fullness.\*

If these memoirs, containing undoubtedly, amidst a mass of prejudices and contradictions, the most authentic materials of the history of that period, were better known, we should be more ready to admit that the deluded agents and sufferers in the Revolution were men, and had hearts and souls like ourselves,—that while error, too great and too fatal, spread its mists around nearly all of them, cold and calculating vice was confined to but a few.

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\* It seems almost like ingratitude in one of the present generation, which individually and collectively has received so much delight from the pen of this illustrious man, to cavil at any thing that comes from him; but is it captious or unfounded to say, that his mind was embosomed in the rich shades, and among the gorgeous pageants of an earlier age,—that it did not keep pace with the rapid changes of our day?

We should also more easily detect the misrepresentations of that Tory and high-toned Whig Press of England, which has so long given laws to American literature. The adherents of both these parties, at present opposed to each other, but differing little in principle, and whom we shall before long see united in opposition to their common enemy, the Radicals, have hitherto cordially united in heaping every opprobrious epithet upon the agents in the French Revolution,\* (with rare exceptions) from the *Constitutionnel* to the *Montagnard*. The select appellations which the Anti-Reformers of Britain divide between the Republicans of France and America, although pronounced false as regards ourselves, we have been sometimes credulous enough to apply to others; but this sort of colonial feeling, which has heretofore too much pervaded our *salons* and our cultivated circles, and which would make our opinions little else than an echo of error and intolerance, is fast giving way to the more healthy and national emotions, which throb in the breast of the great mass of the American people.

Let us not be misled by that press, which is at this moment the greatest obstacle to a right understanding between the liberal minds on both sides of the Atlantic, which is forever occupied in blowing into a flame the embers of hostility, that would otherwise have long since expired,—which in turn misrepresents our actual condition, and the feelings with which we are regarded in Europe,—which checks, by its false statements or its arrogant sneer, those sentiments of mutual respect and affection, that should subsist between us. Let us not, we say, be misled by this blinded press,—but when we see how much it is wanting with regard to us, adopt with distrust its views of European politics.

England, whether we regard her as a nation or as divided into the two great parties, Whig and Tory, was too vitally interested against the French Revolution to judge it fairly. Her wri-

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\* The events of the two last years have in a great measure falsified our remarks, so far as regards the Edinburgh Review and its kindred periodicals,—the brilliant success of the French revolutionists, and the feeble and dilatory progress of their own reformers, have taught them philosophy. But no one, who has traced the course of that Review for the last thirty years, so liberal and high-minded on every subject connected with its own island, can fail to have marked the misplaced arrogance with which it has treated the popular parties of the continent and of America.

ters, almost uniformly, present us with one-sided views of the time ; dwelling upon horrors which are undeniable, and omitting the causes which palliate or excuse those excesses.

We are constantly reminded of the crimes committed by the people, but we are not presented with the catalogue of the vices of their monarchs, not shorter nor less bloody. We are told of the tocsin which awoke the Parisian mob to pillage and slaughter, but we are not reminded that it was the same sound which, at a king's command, ushered in the day of St. Bartholomew. They do not omit to dwell upon the horrors of the *Noyades*, but the bloody *Dragonnades* are quite forgotten. We are told of enormous taxation, of the *maximum* and of the *requisition* of the French youth perishing on the frontiers ; but we are not bidden to recollect treasures wasted, and a nation sent into mourning to gratify the ambition of Louis XIV.

The *Parc-aux-cerfs*, the scandalous vices of the whole reign of Louis XV., the outrageous luxury and oppression of the nobles, and the unheard-of misery of the *Tiers Etat*, are all put aside, that with a single eye we may contemplate the blood-thirstiness and cruelty of the people. It is idle to think of deducing the causes of the French Revolution, from the middle or even the beginning of the eighteenth century. We must go far, far up in their history, and trace down an almost uninterrupted series of oppression, extravagance, misgovernment on the one hand, and of misery, poverty, degradation on the other, from the first Bourbon to the fifth of May, 1789,\* before we can fully appreciate the feelings of the people on that ever-to-be-remembered day.

Poets sing to us of the pride of blood ; of the stirring emotions that flow from a long line of ancestry. Is it not to be supposed, that feelings of another and a deeper dye are also handed down from generation to generation ? There is a chronicle kept in the heart, of the misery of fathers, of mothers, of ancestors, of their oppression and of their wrongs, as well as of chivalrous feats and knightly prowess.

It has been too much the fashion to look upon the French Revolution as a period placed apart,—a period, barred by its unintelligible horrors from all relation with previous and succeeding events ; it was in truth most intimately connect-

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\* Meeting of the States General.

ed with them, and was but the completion and last term of a long series of occurrences, that had been slowly tending to this end. It was a peculiar fulfilment of the declaration, that the sins of the fathers shall be visited upon the children, until the third and fourth generation. It presents the spectacle of a nation, sitting in severe and unpardoning judgment upon the heirs to the crimes of centuries. A king, whose incompetency as a monarch would have been cloaked in more peaceable times by his virtues as a man, perished on the scaffold for the vices of his ancestors. A nobility and clergy, not altogether unwilling to surrender the most galling of their privileges and the most oppressive of their institutions, were stripped of every immunity and every right, by a people, who saw in them only the depositaries of the pride, the arrogance, and the heartlessness of their forefathers.

The French Revolution, with its wild excesses and insatiate cruelty, is utterly incomprehensible, according to any view of human nature, if it be not regarded as a retribution,—fearful and wicked, forbidden by the laws of God and man,—but yet only a retribution, crowded into a brief space, of the wrongs of centuries.

It is to be remembered that the prominent men of the period were either of no education, moral or intellectual, or that they belonged to the class of *savans* and *littérateurs*, who, caressed and insulted by turns, felt perhaps more sensibly than any others, the difference of ranks; and that they were without the restraints of religion, which was almost to a man abandoned by the nation in its utmost need. There seems also to have been no one, sufficiently democratic in his opinions, and at the same time possessed of enough virtue and courage to command the respect and fear of the people. After Mirabeau, there appears to have been no one even capable of over-awing the multitude. ‘France,’ says Madame Roland, ‘appears to have been, as it were, exhausted of men: it is really surprising, that so few have appeared in the progress of the Revolution. We have seen scarcely any thing but pigmies.’

With these prefatory remarks to bespeak the kind consideration of our readers for the subject of the following pages, we approach the auto-biography of Brissot. Brissot, as is well known, was one of the most prominent men of that party sometimes called *Girondins*, sometimes after himself *Brissotins*, which for a moment held the reins of the State, but was shortly

afterwards swallowed up by that Revolution, which, to use the simile of Vergniaud, like Saturn, devoured its own children. Brissot possesses a peculiar claim to our favorable construction, from the interest which, at an early period, he took in our national fortunes ; and he may indeed be regarded as a favorable specimen of the early republican character of France. The memoirs, now under review, purport to have been written at the Abbaye during Brissot's imprisonment there, from May to October, 1793 ; and, as they are guarantied by the names of his son, Anarcharsis Brissot, and of M. Montrol, the author of a History of the Emigration, we know of no reason to doubt their authenticity. The first part, coming down to the year 1787, which alone has yet reached us, was published at Paris, in 1830, and re-printed at Brussels, in a more accessible form, in the course of the same year. The work is not written with any great perspicuity or regard to chronological accuracy ; but we shall be able to extract from it, so far as it comes down, a brief outline of the most marked events of the author's career ; below that period, the contemporary history of the time furnishes abundant materials for completing the narrative of his life.

JEAN PIERRE BRISSOT, the son of a *traiteur*, the thirteenth of sixteen children, was born at Chartres, in the district of *Béauce*, on the 14th of January, 1754. In so large a family, it was clearly desirable that each son should bear some distinguishing title, and Brissot took, according to the custom of his province, the name of the town where he had been nursed, *Ouarville*, which he afterwards anglicized into Warville, and by which appellation he was frequently known. He is, nevertheless, sometimes confounded with his brother, *Brissot Thivars*.

At the early age of eight or nine, at the College of Chartres, he appears to have been an assiduous scholar, but even then he was infected by the spirit of irreligion, which, like a pestilence, was spreading throughout every rank of France. His skepticism drew down the censure of the clergy, and the displeasure of his father. We can easily pardon the anger of one much more stern than he represents his parent, in reading the language in which he speaks of the progress of his mind on this subject.

The jests of a fellow student, Guillard (afterwards an opera



writer) ridiculed him out of the Catholic religion, and not very long after this period, he sits down at his leisure to prove the comparative advantages of belief and unbelief.

‘I went to sleep a materialist, and awoke a deist; next day, I gave the palm to pyrrhonism. When my spirits were high, I was in love with atheism. Such was the state of doubt and error, in which several of my years were passed, until at length, enlightened by the writings of Rousseau, and having maturely weighed the testimony of my own consciousness, I came to the conviction of the existence of a God, and regulated my conduct accordingly. My pyrrhonism was never extended farther than revelation; I had always believed, that revealed religion was imposture. Entertaining these views, I did not hesitate to assail Christianity. Having accidentally encountered an English treatise upon the subject of St. Paul, I wrote another in reply.

This work appeared at Hamburg in 1782. In justice, however, it should be recorded that it is the only irreligious production which fell from his pen. ‘Human happiness,’ he says, ‘flows from a reciprocal toleration of opinions, and I cannot condemn too severely this early trifling, fit only to create irritation, and to cause hatred and strife.’\*

At an early age, that restlessness, that discontent, that longing after immortality, which, with those destined to take a prominent share in active life, so often render even youth little different from an unquiet dream, appear to have seized upon Brissot. He thus commemorates some of the feelings of his boyhood.

‘The professor had divined the ambitious views by which I was tortured; I was wholly absorbed by the passion for renown; a theatre of action alone was wanting. The idea of revolution often entered my mind, though I dared not yet disclose it; and I naturally assigned to myself one of the most important parts in the drama. I had been very deeply impressed by the history of Charles the First and Cromwell. I will, nevertheless, avow, and the declaration will not find favor with those who convert patriotism into a species of cannibalism, that I never, in my romantic dreams, imitated the barbarous example of murdering my captive; I only sent him into exile.’

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\* Tom. I. p. 112.

The earlier stages of his education being passed through, Brissot eagerly grasped at the opportunity offered him of becoming independent of his parents, whom he had offended, and entered himself as a clerk, with one Nolleau, *procureur du Parlement* at Paris, from whom he received a salary of four hundred livres per annum ; in this office, he was so singularly happy as to have Robespierre for a fellow student.

He seems, by his own statement, to have partaken very lightly of the dissipation of the continental metropolis, and to have devoted himself to literary pursuits almost from the moment of his entering Paris. While yet a clerk in Nolleau's office, he attracted the attention of Linguet, at that time a *littérateur* of considerable notoriety, and was allowed to contribute to his *Journal de Politique et de Littérature*. Linguet, however, soon became embroiled with La Harpe, editor of the *Mercur*, who was supported by Suard, and a majority of the academicians ; he lost the favor of the young queen, who at first befriended him, and as the periodical press depended at that time wholly upon the favor of the government, Linguet was obliged to abandon his paper to his antagonists, and take refuge first in Holland, and afterwards in England.

Nolleau died, and Brissot continued his studies with a brother-in-law of the deceased attorney. This person, probably discerning the turn of his clerk's mind, advised him to abandon his chosen profession, either for the bar, (as counsel) or literature. This advice was sufficiently palatable to Brissot, already disgusted with the systematic drudgery of his vocation, and he acknowledged his compliance with it, by publishing almost immediately a pamphlet entitled *Sur l'Indépendance de l'Avocat*. This was followed up soon after, in 1766—7, by a satire, entitled *Pot Pourri*. This latter procured him the honor of a *lettre-de-cachet*, the consequences of which he avoided by a timely flight to his native town.

After a short interval, we again find him in Paris, without friends and without resources. Of this period of his life, he thus speaks :

‘ Poverty was not my severest trial : I was compelled to borrow, and in order to induce my friends to lend, to deceive them in relation to my prospects. This humiliating necessity rent my very soul. How often did I regret, that I was unacquainted with any mechanical occupation, by which, still retaining the

knowledge I had already acquired, I might become independent ! There is no period of my life, on which I look back with greater sorrow. I found in it nothing but misery concealed beneath the show of pleasure, dangerous connexions, and degrading expedients, like that I have already mentioned, and which I then regarded as almost pardonable. I thank Heaven for preserving me from those greater faults and vices, into which distress has power sometimes to hurry us. I still shudder at the recollection.

Brissot appears to have espoused the cause of the revolted American Colonies at an early period, and before the French Court had determined upon their policy, he wrote a satire upon Lord North, entitled *Testament Politique de l'Angleterre*. Vergennes forbade its appearance, but it was published in Switzerland, 'grâce aux presses de Neufchâtel, qui se chargeaient alors d'éclairer la France malgré les ministres.' \*

An Englishman named Swinton, together with Deserre Delatour, a Frenchman, were at this time engaged in publishing at London a French newspaper, called the *Courrier de l'Europe*, which was one of the earliest of the periodicals, that are now like levers strained to upturn the gothic thrones of the continent. The information that Brissot gives us, with regard to this Gazette, may not be unacceptable. Before the publication of the Courrier, says he, England was literally *terra incognita* to the rest of Europe. Nothing was known of her internal transactions. The only knowledge they had of her constitution was derived from Montesquieu, or from the superficial accounts of a few travellers, hired by the Parisian booksellers to spend a fortnight in London, and bring back their budget of frivolity. An acute Frenchman perceived that the necessity under which the continental governments found themselves of accurately understanding the domestic details of English affairs, was a sure foundation for a successful periodical. He resolved to establish it. The French authorities readily comprehended how valuable such a gazette would be to them, in the violent contests then on the eve of breaking out.

The war had already commenced, when the Anglo-French newspaper was begun. It was eagerly read, from Paris to St.

Petersburg. Its list of subscribers was filled from every kingdom of Europe. It acquainted the continent for the first time with Fox and Burke, whose speeches were republished and extolled. All admired the eloquence of these orators, and all were equally astonished that the Guelph should submit to be thus bearded at the foot of his throne. 'What!' exclaimed the readers, 'no *lettres-de-cachet*? No Bastille? The people must indeed be kings across the channel.'

Brissot's *Testament Politique* fell into the hands of the editor, Swinton, who was at this moment looking out for some assistant to superintend the distribution of the paper on the continent. Brissot eagerly accepted the trust, and for the purpose of more conveniently executing it, immediately established himself at Boulogne. The English ministry, harrassed by this spy upon its measures, but unable legally to stop its publication, not long after this succeeded in throwing some obstacles in the way of the transmission of the paper from London to the Continent. The editors then resolved to republish it at Boulogne, and Brissot took upon himself the charge of this department, under the *surveillance* of one Aubert, appointed censor by Vergennes. In the languid and impeded efforts of this feeble periodical, how little was there to foreshow that this same means,—the daily press,—would become the most energetic organ for the advancement of those opinions which, in spite of the open hostility of some, and the lukewarm friendship of others, are winning their always laborious and sometimes bloody way, beating back, broken and routed, the hosts of superstition, intolerance and oppression, and approaching every year nearer and nearer to their certain goal? They go abreast with advancing virtue and knowledge,—it is not to be desired that their progress should be more rapid than that of their natural and rightful companions.

The censorship soon became too rigid, and Brissot, disgusted with Swinton, whom he accuses of falsehood and villany, abandoned the paper and returned to Paris. With characteristic activity, we find him almost immediately, and for some time following, engaged in prosecuting various literary enterprises. While contributing to the *Dictionnaire Ecclésiastique de toute la France*, he wrote a work entitled, '*La Théorie des Lois Criminelles*,' published in 1781, and which afterwards led to the *Bibliothèque Philosophique des Lois Criminelles*, printed at Berlin, in 1782, and edited also by himself. His

*Traité de la Vérité*, which he esteemed his best production, was published at Neuschâtel in 1782.

These works, it is not our province to criticise. They bear the marks of a mind rather active than profound, and especially distinguished by an inquisitive, incredulous and somewhat arrogant disposition, which not unfrequently occasions the unhappiness of its possessor, but in the long run generally applies its own corrective, and ends by bringing good out of evil.

The following sketch of his opinions, or rather emotions, which belongs, we believe, to the year 1783, is characteristic.

‘The overthrow of royalty, which was then believed to be so essential to the interests of France, was at this time the aim of all my writings, and of all my projects. I entertained an irreconcilable hatred for kings : I could not speak of them with the least composure. The very sight of Versailles made me shudder : I never entered the castle but once, and then with the utmost reluctance. I did so at the solicitation of my wife, and the bad humor into which I was thrown, and which I ascribed to another cause, was only the effect of the spectacle of royalty. In order to subvert despotism, I formed a scheme which I thought must be attended with success. To excite a general rebellion against arbitrary governments, the minds of men must be enlightened, not by voluminous and elaborate works, for these the people will not read, but by smaller productions, like those by which Voltaire labored to destroy superstition ; by a journal, which might shed its light in every direction.’

This project, the conception of which gives us a good idea of the very great mental activity of Brissot, was no less than to establish a Lyceum for the universe, at the head-quarters of which, at stated periods, should assemble the *savans* of every country fortunate enough to have any *savans* to send, and of which the high priest should publish a journal, propagating, among other things, the great truths of liberty and equality.

Fired with the thought, Brissot once more bade adieu to Paris, apparently without regret, and made his way through the south of France to Geneva. This visit subsequently gave rise to his *Philadelphien à Genève*, published in 1783. After a short tour through Switzerland, made partly with the object of concerting arrangements for the reprinting and distribution of his proposed *Journal du Lycée*, he returned to Boulogne by the way of Paris, where he was married to Mademoiselle Felicité Dupont.

‘I returned with my mother-in-law to Boulogne. There I passed some weeks in the bosom of filial and fraternal love, in the midst of all the enjoyments of friendship. My marriage had given me three sisters, or rather, three friends, for in this family all hearts were united.’

Early in 1783, Brissot went to London, where he intended to establish his press, and as he could not immediately put it in operation, he once more attached himself to the *Courrier de l'Europe*. In the latter part of the next year, he quitted this paper to pursue the design of his Lyceum, which had languished sometime for want of funds, but was at length begun by the assistance of one Desforgues d'Hurecourt. Never at a loss however for subjects whereupon to employ his pen, and with a most honorable desire to diffuse, as far as lay in his power, accurate and valuable knowledge, Brissot in the mean time published a *Correspondance Philosophique et Littéraire*, a *Tableau exact des Arts et des Sciences de l'Angleterre* and a *Tableau de l'Inde*, the two last works being particularly intended to enlighten his fellow-countrymen on the power and resources of England.

An embargo was unfortunately laid upon his industry by his printer, and he was thrown into prison for debt. The moment he was discharged, he flew to France, where an inhospitable reception awaited him. On suspicion of having a share in the authorship of some of the vile libels, such as the *Amours du Vizir de Vergennes*, *La Gazette Noire*, *Les Passetemps d'Antoinette*, with which the press then swarmed, he was arrested and thrown into the Bastille. He repelled the charge with indignation; vehemently asserting that his love of liberty had never led him into falsehood or indecency, and after an imprisonment of two months, the Minister, softened by the prayers of his wife and friends, or satisfied perhaps with the mortification and suffering thus inflicted upon an inveterate radical, loosened his chains, on the express condition, however, that the *Journal du Lycée* should be discontinued, and the whole scheme abandoned.

From this time (September, 1784) Brissot, poor, and perhaps disheartened by his repeated ill success, appears to have led a quiet and unobtrusive life, until the summer of 1787, when he accepted the somewhat heterogeneous title, which we will not attempt to translate, of *Lieutenant Général de la Chancellerie du Duc d'Orleans*. The labor of this office consisted, as he

says, in an examination of the objects to which the prince might apply his immense fortune.

This flagitious and despicable individual, who had just arrived at his fortune by the death of his father, was at this moment the rallying point of the opposition to the King, and the Ministry, headed by the inefficient Brienne. Brissot entered fully into the views of his principal; and attacking the schemes of the government in several pamphlets, (among which we believe were the *Lettre d' un Citoyen à un frondeur sur les affaires présentes* and the *Moniteur*, a periodical circulated with great secrecy and circumspection, and attributed to the joint labors of Brissot, Condorcet, and Clavière,) he was offered the customary remedy for excessive freedom of opinion, a *lettre-de-cachet*. This he hastily rejected, and once more took refuge in England.

Here, unfortunately, just at the point where it grows most interesting, this first part of the memoir ends; below this period, it is however comparatively easy to detail the principal events of Brissot's life.

Before his leaving France, we find him among the most prominent in laying the foundation of the society of the *Amis des Noirs*, the first association of French philanthropists for that object, the comprehensive wisdom and benevolence of which we of this age, who are witnesses of the perilous position of our gallant brethren of the South, can best appreciate. When we take a view of the whole of Brissot's life, we must not forget to offset this constant devotion to a wise humanity against the errors and the madness of his subsequent course. When shall we learn to discriminate between the unfortunate and the vicious, the unwise and the wicked?

Brissot's sojourn in England appears to have been but short, and in June 1788, he sailed from Havre for Boston, to make the tour of the United States, the government and institutions of which, for several years previous, appear to have attracted much of his attention. 'The object of these Travels was not to study antiques or to search for unknown plants, but to study men who had just acquired their liberty,—my principal design was to examine the effects of liberty upon man, society and government.' These travels, which were published in France in 1791, and republished in English soon after, although highly complimentary to this country, never met with any great favor, we believe, on this side of the Atlantic. They were rather

too radical, in their tone, for our fathers of that day and generation, and perhaps the unhappy fate of their author assisted to create a prejudice against them. This work, although sometimes superficial, shows nevertheless much observation, and is filled with that love of republican institutions and that humane desire for the intellectual advancement of his fellow beings, which so strongly characterised the author's mind.

Deep and accurate thinking never appears to have been an attribute of Brissot; active and indefatigable, he labored more than he reflected. He was essentially a *working-man*, but his virtuous efforts and his unwearied benevolence have not saved his name from being added to that long list of misguided persons, which proves so conclusively that neither industry nor humanity can avail any thing, if unassisted by a knowledge of our own nature, by that worldly wisdom which is the compass and the chart to the mariner through the shoals and breakers of this life, and last and greatest, by that wisdom which cometh from on high, and which alone can lead us to the safe haven of another world.

Late in the year 1788, or in one of the first months of 1789, hastened, as he says, by the approaching Revolution in France, he returned thither, and from this time dates his political career. He almost immediately commenced his *Patriote Français*, one of the most popular of those gazettes which, upon the first dawn of the revolutionary day, sprang into existence like the ephemera, which the sun warms into being. This paper he maintained until his arrest in 1793, at one period assisted by Girey Duprey, who shared his fate, but the greater part of the time without any aid whatever.

To the first meeting of the States General, *L'Assemblée Constituante*, Brissot was not deputed, but early in 1789 we find him a member of the Commune of Paris, a prominent agent of that municipal authority, so powerful to rouse, so impotent to allay the passions of the populace. In this capacity, he had the honor in July of receiving the keys of the Bastille.

During the two subsequent years, Brissot distinguished himself in this office, and more especially in the club of Jacobins, of which he was an early and active member. The celebrated petition, drawn up after the arrest of the King at Varennes, declaring Louis dethroned, and demanding a successor, which was to have been signed upon the Champ de Mars by the assembled people, is said to have been the production



of Brissot, who was at this time *Président du Comité des Recherches de la Ville de Paris*. This, it may be remembered, was the day when La Fayette attacked and dispersed the organs of the turbulent faction, and when, for once during the struggle, the strong arm of the law exercised a legitimate sway.

The second national assembly, *La Législative*, met at Paris, in October 1791; Brissot was deputed to it; and was immediately appointed one of its Secretaries. It now became apparent that the contest, which had so long existed between the Constitutionals and the Jacobins, must end in the overthrow of the former. Brissot had long been a member of the party called by the general appellation of Jacobin, which looked to an ulterior and more levelling change, but comprised within itself two factions, wholly disagreeing as to the nature of that change and the means by which it was to be effected. These two parties, as yet engaged with the common foe, had not leisure, or did not think it safe to defy each other.

The party of the Gironde, containing in its ranks great talent, but, as it proved, no very active courage or comprehensive wisdom, and bearing in its front the names of Condorcet, Brissot, Vergniaud, Louvet, Barbaroux, Petion, whom the royalist Ferrières calls '*une machine à ressort montée par Brissot*,' and many others of almost equal celebrity, were the first to profit by the defeat of the *Constitutionnels*, and when these were driven from the helm, the Girondists assumed the perilous post. It was then that the *boudoir* of Madame Roland became the council chamber, and that this extraordinary woman, to whom Sir Walter Scott should have forgiven an imperfect education and the defective manners of the age,\* as she represents herself knitting or sewing at her little table, in the corner of the room, by turns listened to and influenced the decisions of the ministers.

From the moment of the formation of this party, Brissot was its principal leader in the assembly. The ultra-democracy of his opinions, his incessant activity, which brought him before the public in his *Patriote Français*, at the tribune, and in the Jacobin club, together with his accurate knowledge of the situation of the continental powers, all combined to give him great influence.

\* Vide the remarks in the Life of Napoleon on her Memoirs.

† Mignet, Vol. I. p. 218.

His name will be found constantly recurring in the debates. In the fall of 1791, he was one of the most forward in denouncing and enforcing the severest penalties against the emigrants, and in the early part of July, 1792, when a question connected with the declaration of war was under discussion, Brissot thus spoke of the King.\*

‘The peril in which we are is of the most singular nature that can be imagined. *The country is in danger*, not because our troops are few, nor that they are wanting in courage,—not that our frontiers are unfortified or our resources exhausted. The country is in danger because its strength is paralyzed; and by whom is it paralyzed? By a single man,—by him whom the Constitution declares its head, and whom perfidious ministers have made our enemy. You are told to fear the Kings of Hungary and Prussia, but *I* tell you that the main strength of these monarchs is in Paris, and that it is at home we must conquer them. You are advised to arrest the refractory priests throughout the kingdom,—but *I* tell you to strike at the Court of the Tuileries, if you would reach all these priests with a single blow. You are advised to seize all seditious persons, all intriguers, all conspirators. But *I* tell you that they will all disappear if you strike at the Court of the Tuileries. This Cabinet is the centre to which all their plots tend,—here all their schemes are concerted, hence they all issue. The nation is the tool of the Cabinet. This is the secret of our situation. Here is the source of the evil; here must the remedy be applied.’

With regard to this speech, it may be remarked that, according to Louvet, this question of declaring war against Austria gave rise to the first division between the *Cordeliers* and the *Jacobins purs*, or the *parti Robespierre* and the *parti Brissot*. The former, whom this inveterate partisan uniformly terms *Orleanists*, were opposed to the war, as it increased the influence of La Fayette, the greatest enemy of Orleans, while the latter were in favor of it, as the readiest and surest means of hastening the overthrow of the monarchy, and the formation of a Republic.

The party of the Brissotins were too scrupulous of means to resist such men as Danton, Robespierre and Marat; the 20th of June was followed by the frightful tenth of August, and the sceptre passed from the Girondists; after this they maintained a feeble struggle for existence only. In the train

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\* Mignet, Vol. I., p. 263.

of measures which led to the bloody insurrection of the tenth of August, the party to which Brissot belonged appear to have taken a very irresolute and subordinate share. The memoirs of Barbaroux are very curious in showing with what insanity he planned the insurrection, blind enough not to foresee that the tocsin, which ushered in that morning, tolled the knell of himself and his friends, not less surely than that of Louis. Barbaroux, one of the most honorable and lamented sufferers of the Revolution, was, strange as it may appear, almost the only one of his party, who was active in promoting the rising of the tenth of August. Brissot and Gensonné, together with Louvet, according to the accounts of the latter, succeeded during the day in saving many of the brave Swiss from butchery.

The remarks of Mignet on the parties which followed each other so rapidly in the first years of the Revolution, are distinguished by their clearness and accuracy. The Constitutionals trusted to the virtue and the courage of the upper and middling classes ;—the factions of Danton, Marat, and Robespierre relied upon the passions and vices of the mob. The former yielded only after a severe and desperate contest ; but the Girondists, not commanding the confidence of the middling classes and too scrupulous to call in the multitude to their aid, had no foundation whatever, and the event showed it.

The *Assemblée Legislative* was dissolved, and the Convention summoned to decide the fate of the king. Of this body, Brissot was a member from the department of Eure et Loire. It had hardly met, before the radical dissensions, existing between the Girondists and the faction of Danton and Robespierre, burst into open and violent invective. The punishment of Louis was the Shibboleth, and here Brissot was among the most prominent of those who supported the opinion that, though guilty of high treason and deserving of death, the monarch should have an appeal from the sentence of the Convention to the *primary assemblies* of the people. A majority of voices decided against the delay ; and indeed it is difficult to understand, why a body elected with an express reference to this question should not have pronounced the final sentence, if indeed the Monarch were deserving of death and expediency did not demand the mitigation of the penalty.

But this vote was in accordance with the whole policy of the Girondists. Avoiding an absolute issue with their antagonists, they hoped apparently to conquer, after restoring the tone of

public opinion, by their powerful oratory and their freedom from crime. Their hopes were vain. The execution of the king only rendered the debates of the Convention more violent, and hastened the fate of the minority. After four months, of which almost every day was marked by angry declamation, or brilliant eloquence, but during which the Brissotins, with the exception of Louvet and Barbaroux, appear to have made no one active effort to avert their impending fate, the multitude were called in to shorten the contest. The insurrection of the 31st of May was followed by that of the 1st of June, and on the subsequent day an order was issued for the arrest of the principal members of the obnoxious party.

Louvet speaks of a dinner given by him on the 1st of June, at which he assembled his leading friends and urged upon them the necessity of fleeing to the south of France and organizing an insurrection of the departments against the capital.\* Brissot, with most of his associates, dissented from him, refused to fly, and even went so far as to return to the Convention on the following day. After the decree of arrest, however, Brissot made one effort to save his life, and endeavored to leave the kingdom in the disguise of a merchant of Neufchâtel. He was detected, and apprehended at Moulins on the 16th June. In the mean time a portion of the Girondists had been arrested, a part had fled to the south of France, where after wandering in the manner so touchingly described by Louvet, through their own country, without a resting-place for the soles of their feet, a price set upon their heads and the bloodhounds upon their traces, with but one or two exceptions, they cut short their miserable lives or fell into the hands of their enemies.

‘Thus,’ says Mignet, ‘was overpowered the party of the Gironde, a party illustrious for its great talent and high courage, which did honor to the young republic by its hatred of crime, and its abhorrence of bloodshed and anarchy, its love of order, of justice, and of liberty,—it could only ennoble a certain defeat by a bold struggle and a dauntless death.’

But let us hear the confession of Brissot, when, in prison, and looking forward to the bloody end of a laborious and painful life, he thus passes sentence on his own career. ‘In most of the external circumstances of my life, the sport of the whirlwind, I have been rather the slave of public prejudice than

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\* *Memoires de Louvet*, p. 91.

the apostle of truth.' And this is the statesman, philosopher and politician, with whose name and opinions France at one time rang, who had hoped to be the political regenerator of his country. What could be hoped from a revolution, among the prime movers in which such a man was one of the most able and the most virtuous? How different such a self-condemnation as this, from the feelings with which our early patriots may be supposed to have looked back upon the struggle in which they had fought and conquered! How different the wild struggles, the headlong career, and the inglorious death of Brissot, from the dignified and resolute resistance, the impetuosity regulated in its most vehement efforts, the success, complete but not abused, of the men of 1776!

Brissot, with Vergniaud, Gensonné, Fonfrède and the other leading Girondists, were handed over to the revolutionary tribunal, and after a delay, the length of which is not perfectly explained, they met their fate with uncomplaining courage. On the 31st of October the unfortunate men, to the number of twenty-one, were conducted to the place of execution. With the stoicism of the time, they sang on the way the Marseillaise hymn, applying it to their situation.

‘ Allons, enfans de la patrie !  
Le jour de gloire est arrivé.  
Contre nous de la tyrannie  
Le couteau sanglant est levé.

Brissot is said to have been dejected, the others maintained an unaltered front to the last. Valazé stabbed himself on hearing his sentence. Lasource said to the judges, ‘ I die at a moment when the people has lost its reason ; you will perish the instant it shall recover it.’

No atonement was made to the memory of Brissot or his fellow-sufferers, until after the fall of Robespierre, when the Convention settled a pension upon his widow and children.

It is not difficult to catch the prominent characteristics of the individual, of whose life we have detailed the principal incidents. Correct and beloved in his private life, and indefatigable in his industry, Brissot proposed to himself, as the object of his labors, the instruction, the cultivation, the freedom of his fellow-beings. Had he belonged to a somewhat earlier period, his name would probably have been associated with those most efficacious in bringing about the Revolution, but he,

unfortunately for his happiness and his reputation, was thrown upon a time when philosophers and students were as impotent as their own dusty tomes. Credulous, averse to violent measures, capable of endurance, but incapable of bloody opposition, Brissot was no match for the cruel and unhesitating antagonists with whom he chose to contend. Unwise and ignorant both of his own power and of the character of the people, he urged on a revolution which already required rather the curb than the spur, and atoned for his error by his death. Nor can we say that it was undeserved. Ignorance sometimes demands as severe a penalty as vice, and where the happiness and the safety of millions are concerned, the one is scarcely more excusable than the other. His private virtues, his active benevolence, and his hard fate, must not conceal from us the culpable blindness of his political career.

The excesses of the French Revolution made the march of free opinion for once retrograde, and it is to the madness of such men as Brissot, who did not themselves seek an empire of crime, and who might, by leaguings with the earliest patriots, have withstood those who did, that we are to ascribe much of the strife, the bloodshed, the oppression, the misgovernment of the last forty years. The history of this period has furnished with a standing argument the anti-reformers of every country; it has created in the minds of wise and good men a distrust of the virtue of the people, and all the glory and all the moderation of the 'Three Days' were needed to dim the remembrance of the massacres of September.

We will hope, that a brighter and a calmer day begins now to gild the horizon of France,—that she will now receive the rays of that sun which, reversing the phenomena of the natural world, first illumined this Western hemisphere,—that the same broad light will dissipate the shadow which overhangs the destinies of the island-empire, the home of our forefathers;—that when, before many generations have passed away, this sun shall have reached its noonday height, the citizens of these three great commonwealths shall lay aside their mutual jealousy, and every petty hostility, dignified by the name of national, and enter upon that peaceful career of rivalry and emulation, in which alone the success of the one does not imply the failure of the other; in which alone honor and advantage can be acquired by all.